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ABSTRACT

A three-day research development seminar planning a comprehensive research program on the deanship in educational administration featured papers and responses to the papers delineating the domains of inquiry. The topics of the papers and responses summarized (1) suggest a framework for analyzing the growth and development of a field of study--higher education administration; (2) provide baseline data on characteristics of deans of schools and colleges of education; (3) reveal demographic data from 1,377 schools, colleges, and departments of education; (4) attempt to clarify the place of theory in research; (5) advocate studies of comprehensive case analyses; (6) view schools of education as organizations within environments; (7) stress the functional diversity of the deanship; and (8) seek to identify optimal organizational strategies for the study. (Author/MLF)

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The Deanship in Schools of Education: Report of a Research Development Seminar

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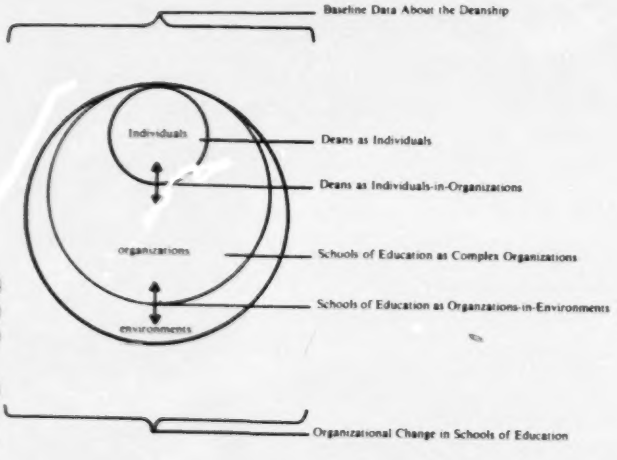
The deanship is a critical role in colleges and universities. Because schools of education are uniquely important to the vitality and development of the nation's education system, the deanship in schools and colleges of education is critical for the expansion of knowledge, knowledge which will strengthen preparatory and career development programs in higher education leadership.

A three-day research development seminar held recently at New York University launched an effort to stimulate establishment of a base for a comprehensive research program on the deanship. Major presentations undertook to delineate the domains of inquiry bearing upon the deanship on several levels of analysis, as outlined by Jack Culbertson in his opening address to the assembled group of deans, professors and graduate students of higher education. These domains are portrayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for the Research Program: The Domain Structure



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Describing the factors affecting UCEA's decision to broaden its involvement to encompass higher education as well as K-12 systems, Culbertson pointed out that many scholarly observers of higher education were concerned about the rapid increase in the number of programs to prepare higher educational leaders during the last decade. At the same time, the growth in basic knowledge to undergird these programs has been quite limited. He suggested that Thomas Kuhn's framework for analyzing the growth and development of a field of study, that is, development of a discipline which progresses from a pre-paradigm state to a paradigm state, could help guide projected research. This includes the need to locate the responsible groups within the scholarly community which can provide the leadership necessary to progress from diversity of perspective to greater consensus on the parameters of the field, as well as the need to build a "disciplinary matrix" on which to guide research inquiry.

Frederick Cyphert and Nancy Zimpher of Ohio State University provided some baseline data which sought to identify the personal and professional background characteristics, satisfactions, and frustrations of deans of schools and colleges of education. Their survey data indicated that deans are most commonly healthy and energetic, middle-aged, married, male, white, Protestant, Democrat academics from a relatively non-college educated, lower middle class, non-professional-managerial, native born, small town, multi-child family background. They are obviously happy, satisfied, secure and perceive themselves as influential and effective administrators.

In looking at schools of education as complex organizations, David Clark of Indiana University reported findings from a multi-phased study which painted a somewhat less optimistic picture. Examining demographic data from 1377 schools, colleges and departments of education (hereafter SCDE's), Clark found that there is no typical teacher education institution, unlike the relative homogeneity of training sites in such professional fields as medicine, nursing, law and even business. Even more importantly, he concluded that quality control systems which have been established for the field do not guarantee the maintenance of minimum quality standards, nor do discernible national policies or programs exist for the education profession. Clark observed that administra-

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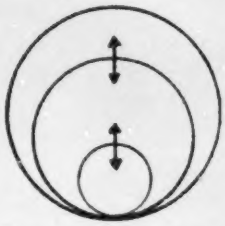


tive leaders confront what might be termed "a limited draw" when they turn to their faculty in an effort to respond to the new demands being placed upon teacher education institutions. Even the bureaus, centers, and institutes, which were created to provide a shelter for concentrated activity fostering educational research and development, have tended to develop "hardening of the arteries", rationalizing low productivity by non-bureau faculty and becoming caught up in "failure cycles" of attempts at ritualistic, low-cost, tangential change.

Georgianna Appignani, Dean of Education at Kean College of New Jersey, responded to Clark's paper by observing that two additional consequences of this state of affairs seem to be the decrease of the public's trust in schools to deliver quality education generally and the loss of confidence by teachers and administrators in SCDE's to provide adequate teacher education programs. Clark further commented that perhaps the apparent contradiction in the Cyphert-Zimpher findings and his own may be largely a function of a certain amount of self-deception by deans and other higher educational leaders. They have become so habituated to and skilled in salesmanship to extra-institutional agencies and individuals that they may be practicing their act on themselves. Many conference participants concurred that additional research efforts on this question are needed.

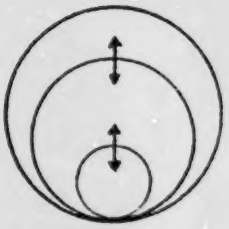
With these conflicting baseline data, an attempt at clarifying the place of theory in research on higher educational administration was made in a paper by Daniel Griffiths of New York University. He agreed with Culbertson that higher education administrative theory is in a pre-paradigm stage of development and argued that a phenomenological approach to model building, based upon perceptions and observations of administrative behaviors, may provide a greatly needed reconceptualization of administration and organizations. This approach is needed largely because theoretical constructs have not kept pace with the discovery of facts and modern thinking in the behavioral sciences, with philosophical insights, and with social change.

In reacting to the Griffiths paper, Richard Lonsdale, Professor of Educational Administration and Higher Education at NYU, generally concurred with the rather Dionysian approach to research advocated by Griffiths, drawing attention to the need for synthesis and over-arching concepts in current administration theory. Nonetheless, not all of the participants were as enthusiastic. Paula Silver of UCEA stated that she was apprehensive about the implications of such an approach, pointing out that there is a need to refine existing models, not to atheoretically begin anew. In addition, she feared that investigators might be encouraged to simply report what they observe without diminishing their potential biases with at least some safeguards from theoretical constructs.

In another paper, Arthur Coladarci of Stanford University also argued for a healthy intellectual agnosticism in strategies for research on the role and person of the dean of education. Based upon his recent personal experiences in the role, and conversation and observations with other deans, Coladarci pointed out that the search for long-lived usable applications, universal explanations or high derivative-yielding theoretical formulations would be, at best, premature. He went on to argue that inquiry into the dean and his/her role should be rationalized and designed with explicit engagement of three realities: 1) heterogeneity of schools of education and their host institutions; 2) multiplicity of variables in the role and performance of deans; and 3) the near-certainty that the performance of a dean is explainable most usefully in terms of interactions among personal and situational variables and characteristics. Thus, Coladarci advocated studies of comprehensive case analyses, that is, deans-and-deanships-in-context that are maximally inclusive of the known and presumed relevant parameters of person, inter-person, institution process and agenda. Over time, such studies, if they adequately inform each other, also will permit the development of a useful taxonomy of variables; this taxonomy, in turn, can serve the dual purpose of advising new studies and inviting more similarity of address across case studies.

As the reactor to the Coladarci paper, Frank Lutz, Professor of Education Policy Studies at Pennsylvania State University, observed that differences in institutional contexts are only understandable and useful when set against some familiar referent. He strongly agreed with Coladarci that "context-constrained research does not mean the inevitability of context-limited generalizations and explanations". However, Lutz did suggest some limitation on the multiplicity of variables included in role performance studies advocated by Coladarci because of the non-manipulability of certain spurious interrelationships, such as the potential relationship of height and weight with role performance.

Schools of education as organizations-in-environments were considered in a paper delivered by Donald McCarty Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Wisconsin. McCarty noted that SCDE's are generally subunits within a larger host environment, competing for increasingly sparse resources among larger and more prestigious units of the university. The external societal environment is also exerting new pressures resulting from sweeping changes in the social and economic structure. For instance,



SCDE's recently have been threatened from their traditional commanding position in the educational practitioner world by teacher unions which have come to exert greater influence over teacher preparation and certification.

Since the very survival of the organization increasingly depends upon these interrelationships with the environment, McCarty advocated a need for systematic research in the organization-in-environment domain, especially in the deanship which often serves as the major boundary-spanning component for SCDE's in dealing with continuous changes in an uncertain environment McCarty also noted that efforts to develop more adequate theory, dealing with organization-environment interaction, is hampered by the lack of careful research into the various processes of such interaction.

In responding to McCarty's paper, William Monahan of West Virginia University cautioned against collapsing organizational units of very diverse size, scope of mission, and dimensions of autonomy, such as those contained in the broad SCDE category, into composite units for purposes of generalizable inquiry. There is a potentially hazardous consequence in this seemingly functional contraction in that it tends to obscure quite different organizational configurations and the nature of their environmental process. While stressing the importance of careful analysis of the various interactive modes confronted by education units as organizations-in-environments, Monahan added that he hoped that these efforts turn out to be timely enough to be helpful.

The functional diversity of the deanship, both within and across institutions, was the theme of the paper by William Dill, Dean of NYU's School of Business Administration. Moving through a brief history of "deaning" in American higher education, Dill pointed to several future trends and challenges. Because deans today must routinely supervise flat organizational structures involving hundreds of faculty, thousands of students, and millions of dollars, they must be better chosen and better prepared to do the job. Beyond academic leadership, Dill warned that deans must begin to learn the relationship between economics and education, deliver better personnel management, and to take leadership to influence colleges and universities to become more socially responsive and responsible. He concluded by challenging the participants to set their sights sufficiently high to ensure that the scope of the projected research effort will encompass some of the issues necessary to make the deanship work more effectively and to demonstrate that higher standards in the selection and training of deans have beneficial outcomes.

Dean Bornheimer, Associate Professor of Higher Education at NYU, responded to Dill's paper by reiterating the need for greater responsiveness to the new challenges which lie ahead for deans, especially as faculty collective bargaining begins to alter the traditional collegial governance structure of colleges and universities. He stressed the urgency of the research effort alluded to by Monahan and Dill, to ensure maximum benefit in the design and implementation of more adequate pre-service and in-service training programs.

Paula Silver, Associate Director of UCEA, presented the concluding paper of the Conference in which she sought to identify optimal organizational strategies in implementing the research objective of the Conference, that is, increased knowledge production on the deanship. Two levels of coordination were addressed, the within-domain and the inter-domain. With regard to the within-domain level, Silver weighed the relative benefits of various centralized-to-decentralized structural arrangements around inter-institutional research efforts against possible obstacles which might be likely to occur. These obstacles included financial constraints, destructive competition, a perceived theory-practice dichotomy and debilitating inter-personal conflict. She found from a small pilot study of these factors that a strategy of moderate decentralization might result in the highest probability of successful goal attainment. On the inter-domain level, Silver suggested that a steering committee pattern comprised of leaders, either those working within each domain or study, or others not directly involved in domain-specific activities, might be of greatest advantage in facilitating the overall research effort.

In response to the Silver paper, Vance Peterson of the University of Toledo, cautioned that because implementation is a process and not simply an event, attention must be given to implementation strategies which do not ignore the process once an organizational framework has been adopted. Although little can be done about some of the difficulties identified in the implementation of the proposed research effort, sensitivity to them can at least serve to broaden the investigators' perspective and hopefully diminish their detrimental effects.

Thus, the program of research projected by the Conference is an ambitious undertaking, representing a novel approach to knowledge production in the developing field which is higher educational administration. The Conference was certainly a stimulating and productive initial step on which future efforts to research and improve higher educational leadership can be grounded. □